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AUTHOR Aldwin, Carolyn M.
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ABSTRACT

Although many studies have documented age-linked shifts in values, few studies have demonstrated the relationship between values and psychological adjustment. To explore the relationship between values, daily stressful experiences, positive experiences, and coping strategies, 100 white, middle-aged adults (ages 45-64 years) completed the Ways of Coping Questionnaire and Checklist 18 times over a 9-month period. Perceptions of stressful and positive experiences were assessed through the Hassles and Uplifts Scale, and values were assessed through the Buhler Life Goals Inventory. An analysis of the results showed that values had situation- and sex-specific relationships to hassles, uplifts, and coping. Valuing affiliation strongly related to family uplifts for men, while valuing success mildly related to work uplifts for women. The relationship between values and coping was more complex, and unlike uplifts, was stronger for women than for men. In general, a specific value appeared to be related to adaptive strategies in congruent situations, but to less adaptive strategies in unrelated or competing situations (e.g., valuing affiliation led to instrumental strategies in family situations but to avoidant strategies with work problems). Future research should focus on replicating the current study with other, less homogeneous samples and age groups. (BL)

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VALUES, STRESS AND COPING IN MIDDLE AGE

Carolyn M. Aldwin
University of California at Irvine

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Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Gerontological Society of America, San Francisco, CA, November 17-22, 1983.

VALUES, STRESS AND COPING IN MIDDLE AGE[1]

Carolyn M. Aldwin[2]

There has been a renewed interest in the relationship between values and adaptation across the lifespan. Many studies have documented age-linked or cohort shifts in values (Antonucci, Gillet and Hower, 1974; Buhler, Brind and Horner, 1968; Christenson, 1977; Danziger, 1978; Kogan and Wallach, 1961; Ryff, 1979), with most demonstrating shifts from externally-oriented values to more internally-oriented ones. However, there may be sex differences in values shifts across the lifespan. Jung (1938) predicted that young men are most likely to focus on achievement- and success-related values, whereas older men are likely to refocus on family and adhere to more introspective values. Women are thought to show the opposite pattern -- shifting from family/interpersonal concerns to extrafamilial achievement and success after menopause. Work by Lowenthal, Thurnher and Chiriboga (1975) has partially support Jung's observation.

Others have sought to understand the relationship between values and psychological adjustment. Buhler and her colleagues (Buhler and Massarik, 1968) have suggested that self-limiting orientations -- valuing caution, submissiveness and avoidance of hardship -- may not only increase with age, but also be associated with depression. The relationship between values and adaptation may also be age-specific. Valuing achievement and instrumentality in old age may be associated with poor life satisfaction (Antonucci, 1974) and psychopathology

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[2]Program in Social Ecology, University of California, Irvine, CA 92717.

(Clark and Anderson, 1967). There are also sex and lifestage differences in the relationship between values and self-concept (Thurnher, 1974:1975) as well as in values and self-esteem (Antonucci et al., 1974).

However, few studies have examined the processes by which specific values may impair or enhance psychological adaptation. May (1979) has suggested that value conflict may lead to anxiety. Lazarus and his colleagues (Lazarus and Launier, 1978; Wrubel, Benner and Lazarus, 1981) have suggested that values (along with beliefs and commitments) may affect how stressful situations are appraised. However, there has been little empirical evidence demonstrating the pathways through which values affect adaptation.

Milton Rokeach (1973, p. 5) has defined values in the following manner: "A value is an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence." Two aspects of this definition are important for understanding the pathways through which values can affect adaptation. First, values involve a conception of what is desirable, and thus may be likely to affect positive and negative daily experiences. Second, values involve preferred modes of conduct, and thus may be important in influencing which coping strategies are used in handling stressful situations. However, the relationship between values and adaptation can only be understood within an environmental context. For example, whether a particular conception of what is desirable has positive or negative consequences may depend upon the resources available to achieve that conception. Valuing instrumentality and achievement may be associated with psychopathology in poor inner-city elders (Clark and Anderson, 1967) primarily because the individuals involved lacked the resources to realize those values. In elderly whose social position affords

them access to necessary resources, it is likely that valuing achievement and instrumentality would be associated with enhanced well-being. Thus, the types of values held, in conjunction with the resources available, may influence what is perceived as a source of stress and/or positive experiences (see Aldwin, 1982).

Rather than conceptualizing values as competing or as mutually exclusive, as Rokeach (1973) and Allport (Allport, Vernon, Lindsay, 1960) have suggested, it is hypothesized that individuals are likely to hold a range of values which affect behavior by being activated by situational demands. Only those values which are situationally relevant are necessarily activated. Rather than suggesting that individuals value instrumentality or expressivity, it is important to understand what effect holding those particular values have in different situations and with different access to resources.

Present Study

The purpose of the present study is to explore the relationship between values, daily stressful experiences (hassles), positive experiences (uplifts) and the use of coping strategies. The study focused on valuing affiliation and achievement, as these are especially relevant in this middle-aged sample. This study addresses four questions: First do values render individuals more vulnerable to stress, or are they more likely to be a source of positive experiences? Second, do values influence the use of coping strategies? Third, are the relationships between values, hassles, uplifts and coping situation-specific? In other words, do specific values influence adaptive behavior only in relevant situations? Fourth, given hypothesized sex-related shifts in these values across the lifespan, are there sex differences in how these values relate to adaptive behavior?

Methods

The sample consisted of 100 middle-aged (45-64), community-residing men and women participating in the Berkeley Stress and Coping in Aging Project. The individuals were white, primarily Protestant or Catholic, and middle class. Most were married and had children. The overall project studied stress, coping, social support and adaptation over the course of a year. The respondents were asked to fill out the Ways of Coping Questionnaire both during interviews and as homework for a possible total of 18 times over the course of nine months. The Coping Questionaire asked individuals to relate a specific stressful incident that they coped with in the past month. The episodes were later categorized into work, health or family problems (see Folkman and Lazarus, 1980). Respondents also completed a Ways of Coping checklist to indicate how they coped with each episode. The 68-item checklist was subsequently analyzed to yield seven factors: problem-focused, minimize threat, seek emotional support, wishful thinking, help-seeking/avoidance, and blame self (Aldwin, C., Folkman, S., Schaefer, C., Coyne, J. and Lazarus, R., 1980). In general, problem-focused and growth oriented coping are adaptive processes relating to positive morale; wishful-thinking, help-seeking/avoidance, and seeking emotional support are related to poor morale (see Aldwin and Lazarus, 1982).

Perception of stressful and positive experiences was measured by the Hassles and Uplifts Scale, which were administered as homework during 9 months of the study. Kanner (1981) had categorized hassles and uplifts into a number of different areas, including work and family.

Values were measured using the Buhler Life Goals Inventory (BLGI) (Buhler, 1965), which was administered during the 10th month of the study. The BLGI is

a list of 90 items describing general achievements and personal qualities which may be important to the individual. Each statement is rated on a 5-point Likert scale, and individuals are free to endorse as many or as few items as they choose. Aldwin (1982) developed eight subscales, two of which will be discussed here: affiliation and success (see Appendix A).

Results

Analysis of variance revealed no age or age-by-sex interaction in valuing affiliation or success. There were also no sex differences in endorsing affiliation values, but men did value success significantly more than women ($f(1,87) = 9.02$, $p < .01$).

However, there were strong sex differences in the relationship between values and adaptive behavior. Table 1 presents the relationship between values, hassles and uplifts for each sex. Note that valuing achievement and success are unrelated to hassles in both work and family situations. However, valuing affiliation was strongly related to uplifts in family situations for men; valuing success was mildly related to uplifts in work situations for women. If men and women in this study are developing cross-sex shifts in value patterns (as suggested by the lack of female dominance in valuing affiliation), then it is interesting to note that this newly developing pattern of values appears to be related primarily to positive experiences, and is situation- and sex-specific.

The relationship between values and the use of coping strategies is slightly more complicated. Table 2 presents the relationships between valuing affiliation and success, on the one hand, and the use of coping strategies in family and work problems, on the other. For women, valuing affiliation is strongly related to adaptive coping strategies -- problem-focused and growth-oriented coping -- in family situations, but related to somewhat maladaptive strategies in work

situations: minimizing threat, wishful thinking, and seeking emotional support. For men, on the other hand, values appear to be unrelated to coping strategies in family situations, with the exception that affiliation is negatively related to minimizing threat. In other words, men who value family closeness are less likely to try to minimizie problems in family contexts.

Valuing success bears fewer relationships to choice of coping strategies. For women, valuing success is strongly linked to help-seeking/avoidance in work situations -- that is, they may seek professional help or advice but avoid being with others in general. It is also weakly associated with growth-oriented coping in both family and work situations. For men, valuing success is unrelated to coping strategies.

Discussion

Values do appear to have situation- and sex-specific relationships to hassles, uplifts and coping. Valuing affiliation related to family uplifts for men; valuing success related to work uplifts for women, although the relationship was somewhat weaker. This may be due to the fact that only half of the women were working, and the ones who did work tended to have low-paying clerical and service jobs, which may be less conducive in general to success-related uplifts. The relationship between values and coping is more complex, and, unlike uplifts, stronger for women than for men. In general, a specific value appears to be related to adaptive strategies in congruent situations, but to less adaptive strategies in unrelated or competing situations (e.g., valuing affiliation leads to instrumental strategies in family situations but avoidant strategies with work problems). However, causal directionality could not be assessed in this study, and it is unclear whether holding certain values leads to hassles, uplifts and coping, or whether these types of experiences can affect values.

Further work is needed to determine if the sex- and situation-specific nature of values replicates in other samples and other age groups. It would be interesting to know, for example, if valuing success has a less ambiguous relationship to uplifts and coping strategies in a sample of women with higher status jobs, or whether valuing affiliation in younger men is also related to family uplifts. Still, investigation of the pathways through which values affect adaptational outcomes appears to be a fruitful line of research.

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Table 1

Correlations between Values and Hassles and Uplifts (by sex)

	Work Situations		Family Situations	
Values	Hassles	Uplifts	Hassles	Uplifts
Affiliation				
(women)	-.08	-.18	-.12	.23
(men)	.16	.06	.15	.50***
Success				
(women)	.15	.25*	.16	.18
(men)	.10	.17	-.13	.13

*$p < .05$

***$p < .001$

Table 2

Correlations between Values and Coping Strategies
(by sex)

	Affiliation		Success	
Coping Strategy	Family	Work	Family	Work
Problem-focused				
(women)	.41***	.27		
(men)				
Wishful-Thinking	.03	.47**		
(women)	.03	.47**		
(men)				
Help-seeking/ avoidance				
(women)			.17	.53***
(men)				
Growth				
(women)	.38***	.28	.27*	.29
(men)				
Minimize Threat				
(women)	.10	.53***		
(men)	-.46***	.23		
Seek Emotional Support	.07	.34*		

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* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

*** $p < .001$

APPENDIX A

Value Subscales

Affiliation Orientation

Have sexual satisfaction
Give and receive love
Be married
Have children
Be sensitive to others' needs

Success Orientation

Be successful, get concrete rewards
Advance in career
Compete successfully
Find acknowledgement, praise
Leave a mark behind me
Make a name for myself, have fame

From: The Buhler Life Goals Inventory, Buhler, 1965.
The items on are a Likert scale from 1-5, where 5 indicates that the items is extremely important to the individual.